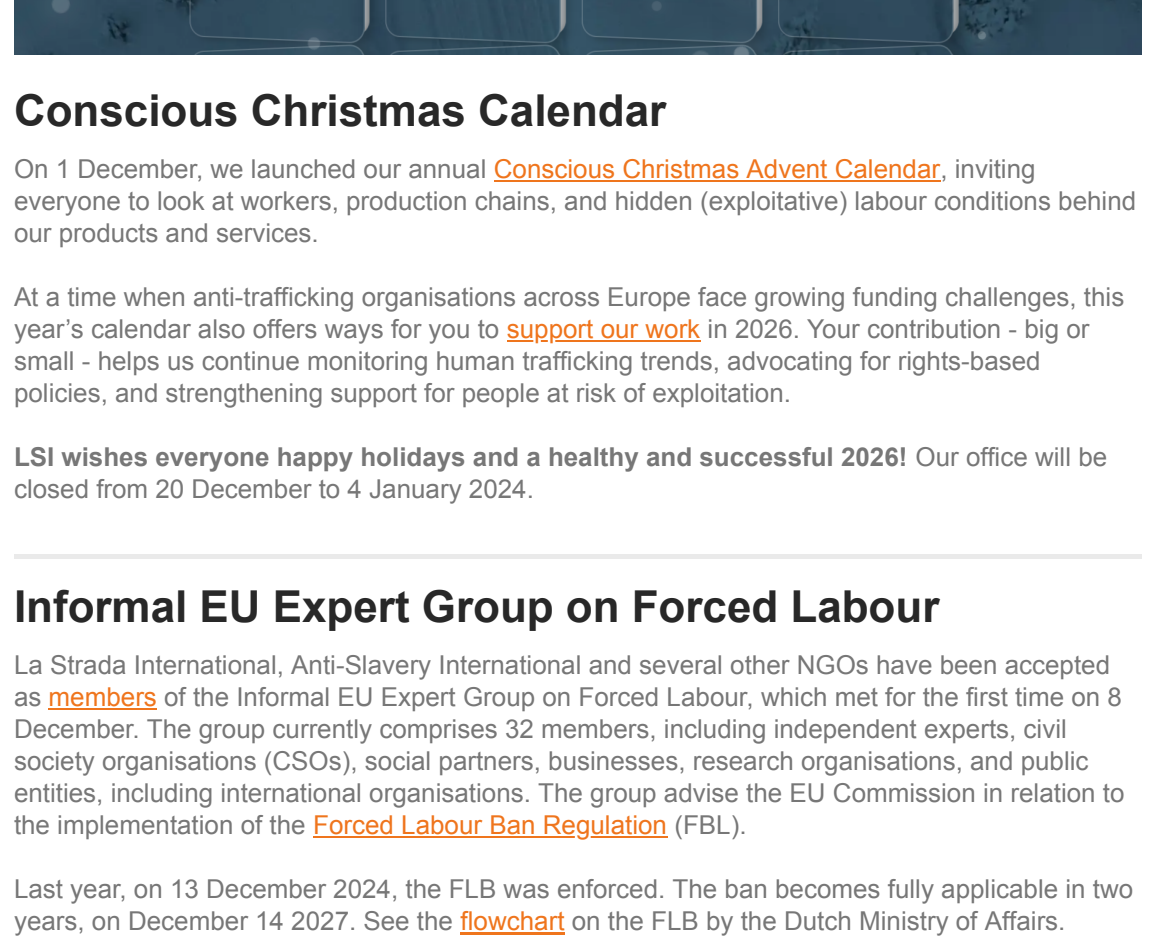


NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2025

La Strada International wishes to inform and update you on developments in the field of trafficking in human beings and activities of the Platform and member organisations. We welcome your feedback and input. Please [e-mail us](#).

Do You or Someone You Know Needs Help? To report suspicions of human trafficking, seek advice or support, check our [members' help and hotline numbers](#).

LSI NEWS



1 2 3 4

Conscious Christmas Calendar

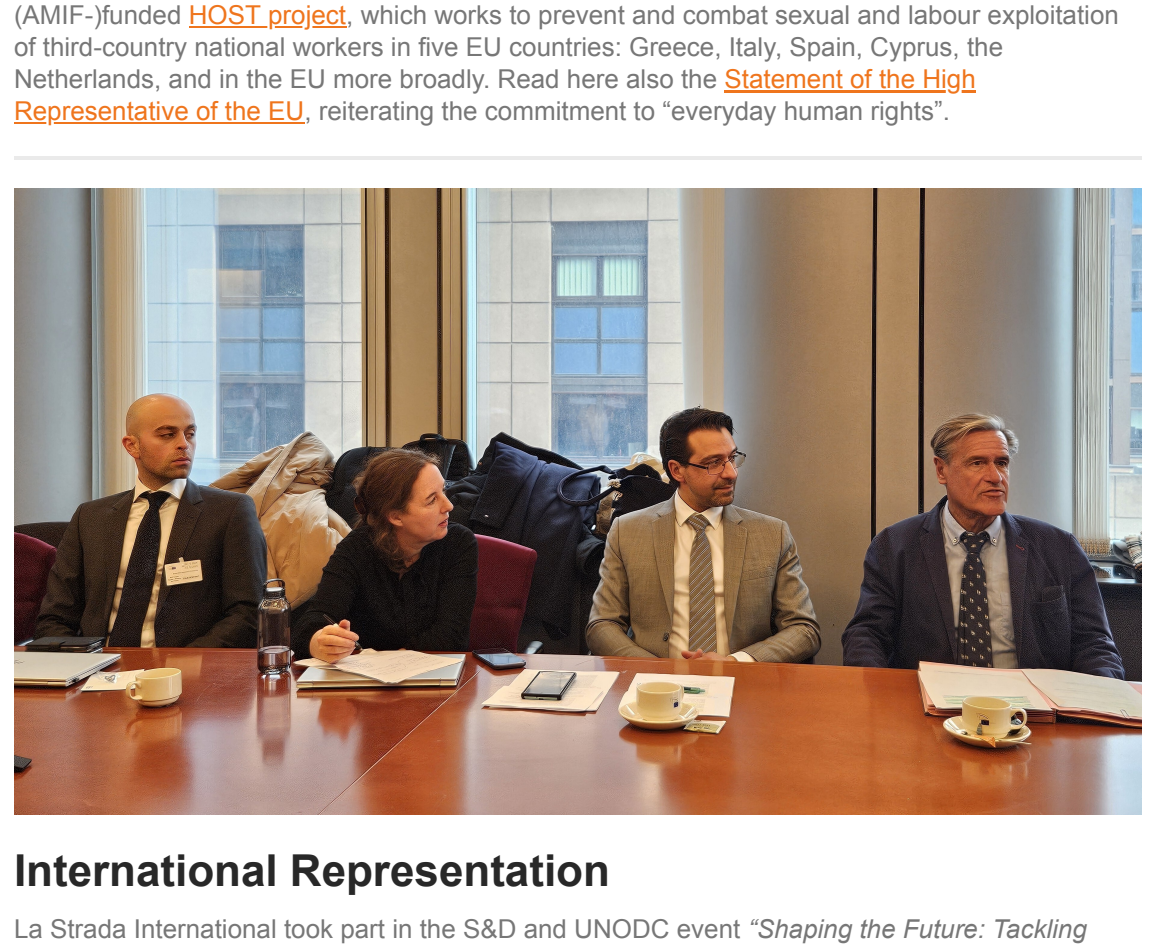
On 1 December, we launched our annual [Conscious Christmas Advent Calendar](#), inviting everyone to look at work from a new perspective, to address root causes, protection and justice. The calendar also offers ways to get involved in our work in 2026. Your contribution – big or small – helps us continue monitoring human trafficking trends, advocating for rights-based policies, and strengthening support for people at risk of exploitation.

LSI wishes everyone the happy holidays and a healthy and successful 2026! Our office will be closed from 20 December to 4 January 2024.

Informal EU Expert Group on Forced Labour

La Strada International, Anti-Slavery International and several other NGOs have been accepted as [members](#) of the Informal EU Expert Group on Forced Labour, which met for the first time on 8 December. The group currently comprises 32 members, including independent experts, civil society organisations (CSOs), social partners, labour research organisations, and public entities, including international organisations. The group advises the EU Commission in relation to the implementation of the [Forced Labour Ban Regulation](#) (FLB).

Last year, on 13 December 2024, the FLB was enforced. The ban becomes fully applicable in two years, on December 14 2027. See the [flowchart](#) on the FLB by the Dutch Ministry of Affairs.



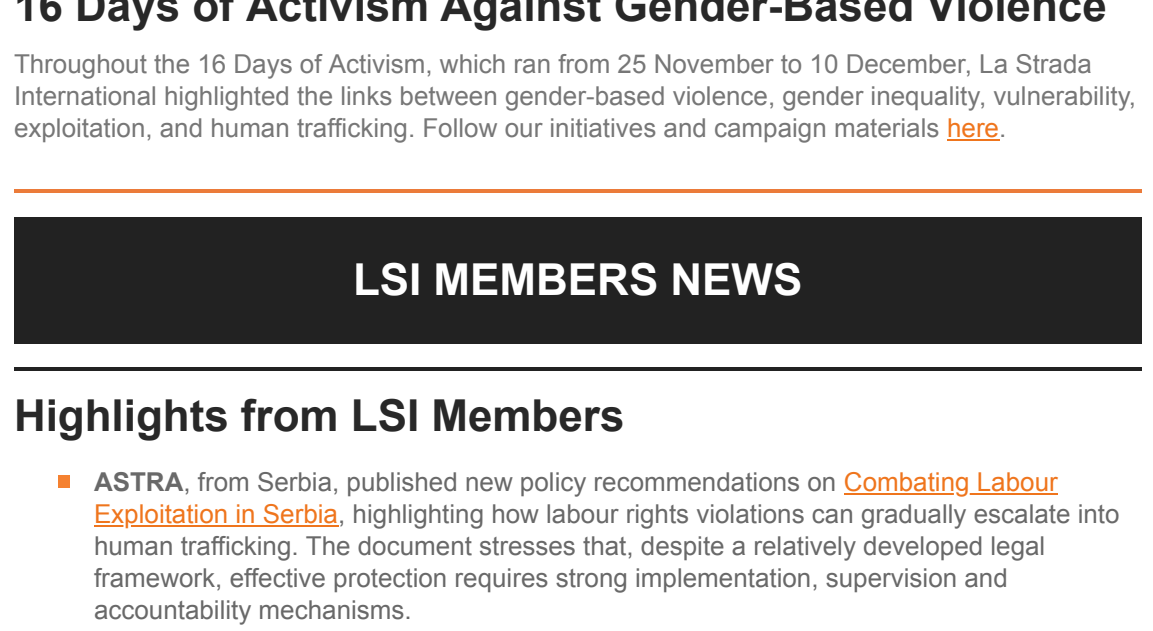
Statement International Migrants Day

To mark International Migrants Day (18 December), LSI published a [statement](#) highlighting the realities faced by thousands of people subjected to labour exploitation across Europe, particularly migrants, who continue to face significant barriers in accessing support, protection and justice. The statement aligns with the EU (AMF)-funded [Trafficked on Route](#) project, emphasising the need to strengthen early identification, safe reporting and access to support along migration routes, raise awareness among third-country nationals, and expand safe and legal migration pathways.

EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunnes and IOM Director General Amy Pope also released a [video statement](#), underlining the critical role migrants play in societies and recalling that migration is as old as humanity itself. LSI hopes that these messages of protection, dignity and solidarity will be meaningfully reflected in the EU's migration policies.

Human Rights Day: Statement on Labour Exploitation in the Hospitality Sector

On Human Rights Day (10 December), LSI released a [statement](#) drawing attention to the high risk of labour exploitation in the hospitality sector, a sector known for low wages, long hours, short-term and part-time contracts, and a lack of job security, especially for seasonal and temporary migrant and undocumented workers, on which this sector largely depends. LSI is part of the EU (AMF)-funded [HOSI project](#), which works to prevent and combat sexual and labour exploitation of third-country national workers in five EU countries: Greece, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, the Netherlands, and in the EU more broadly. Read here also the [Statement of the High Representative of the EU](#), reiterating the commitment to 'everyday human rights'.



International Representation

La Strada International took part in the S&D and UNODC event 'Shaping the Future: Tackling Human Trafficking in a Changing Europe', hosted by MEP Juan Fernando López Aguilar. Suzanne Hoff, LSI's International Coordinator, highlighted the value of the EU legal framework but stressed the need for stronger implementation and improved access to support for trafficked persons across Europe, outlining several recommendations for the upcoming EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy.

On 16 December, our international coordinator also moderated a session during the combined EU National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators and Rapporteurs and the EU Civil Society Platform meeting on the upcoming EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy. See [our members' take](#) on the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

Board Meeting & LSI's Strategy Plan for 2026 – 2030

On 15 December, LSI's board meeting was held in Brussels, Belgium. The Board reviewed and approved LSI's Action Plan for 2026–2030, following the adoption of the overall LSI Strategic Plan by both the Board and the General Assembly in September. The Plan will be published on our website early January 2026.



16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

Throughout the 16 Days of Activism, which ran from 25 November to 10 December, La Strada International highlighted the links between gender-based violence, gender inequality, vulnerability, exploitation, and human trafficking. Follow our [Initiatives and campaign materials](#) [here](#).

LSI MEMBERS NEWS

Highlights from LSI Members

- ASTRA**, from Serbia, published new policy recommendations on [Combating Labour Exploitation in Serbia](#), highlighting how labour rights violations can gradually escalate into human trafficking. The document stresses that, despite a relatively developed legal framework, effective protection requires strong implementation, supervision and accountability mechanisms.
- MRCI**, from Ireland, launched a campaign demanding protection for migrant workers' rights from the Irish government. Sign this [petition](#) to put pressure on Minister Alan Dillon to grant all work permit holders the ability to freely change employers after two years.
- FLEX**, from the UK, published "[Unravelling the Nets](#)", examining UK seafarer and fishing-related visa and entry clearance policies and their impact on migrant fishers. The analysis addresses key gaps in understanding how immigration rules shape vulnerability and working conditions in the fishing sector. FLEX will host a [launch event](#) for the report at the UK House of Lords, in London, on 20 January. See also the [policy summary](#).
- La Strada Moldova** joined efforts with partner organisations to launch [www.evioleta.md](#), the first national online platform dedicated to preventing digital violence and supporting women and girls. The website is directly linked to the Women and Girls Helpline (0 8008 8008) and an online counselling chat, offering confidential and safe access to professional support. [Read more here](#).
- La Strada Poland** and **Pro-tukipiate Centre** (Finland) took part in a joint study visit to Riga as part of the project 'Let's Share Knowledge, Let's Share Experience', focusing on exchanging practices and strengthening cross-border cooperation in anti-trafficking work.
- KOK**, from Germany, published a report addressing the issue of "[Tax debt of victims of forced prostitution](#)". The report shows that perpetrators of sexual exploitation often misuse the identities of their victims to file fictitious tax returns or to conceal income from forced prostitution, which results in tax burdens for the victims. After the exploitation, they are then sceptive to register with tax debts, even though they were unaware of the events and earned little or no income themselves.

HIGHLIGHTS



Provisional Agreement Reached on Revised EU Victims' Rights Directive

After nearly two and a half years of negotiations, the EU Parliament and the Council have reached a [provisional political agreement](#) on the revision of the EU Victims' Rights Directive. Since the Commission published its proposal back in July 2023, La Strada International has closely monitored the process and advocated with PICUM for stronger safeguards, including a clear firewall between support services and immigration enforcement, as well as improved access to justice and compensation. However, the agreed amendments do not introduce binding obligations for Member States on these issues. As Suzanne Hoff, LSI's International Coordinator, stated: "*one of the biggest barriers is the lack of safe reporting mechanisms... without this guarantee, many victims will remain too afraid to come forward*". See also [PICUM's position](#). The provisional agreement reached will now have to be formally adopted by the Council and the European Parliament. The full text of the revised Directive is expected to be published in January 2026.

When Do Poor Working Conditions Amount to Human Trafficking?

The [EU Anti-Trafficking Hub](#), of which LSI is a partner, has published a [new study](#) on the concept of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation. The research, providing examples from Italy, Finland, France, Spain, and the Netherlands, focuses on conceptual clarity, legal interpretation and practical challenges in identifying labour exploitation as human trafficking.

La Strada International welcomes this first publication of the Hub and its recommendations, particularly the call to address the full continuum of exploitation and to strengthen the use of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive framework, develop national guidelines and common indicators, improve training for practitioners, and ensure access to support services, safe reporting, compensation and specialised justice actors for all victims of labour exploitation.

Currently, the Hub is further working on a study on the collection and improvement of EU statistics on human trafficking, as well as a response to its key elements related to National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs) and related focal points. This work will be followed next year by dedicated studies on NRMs and on a possible European Referral Mechanism. In the context of the study on the ad hoc questions, an online workshop with National Coordinators and Rapporteurs was held on 2 December 2025.

UN Experts Joint Statement on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

UN experts issued a [joint statement on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery](#) (2 December), marking the start of a campaign to celebrate the centenary of the Slavery Convention next year. They underlined that human trafficking continues to affect millions of people and remains a cross-border challenge requiring stronger commitment and cooperation from states and businesses. The experts further concluded that smugglers do not drive irregular migration; instead, migration pathways and the need to ensure the meaningful protection of survivors.



GRETA: New Country Reports & 2026 Evaluation Priorities

GRETA held its [55th plenary meeting](#) from 17 to 21 November in Strasbourg, and adopted final reports on Latvia, Malta, and the United Kingdom as part of the fourth evaluation round. During the meeting, GRETA also adopted the programme and final reports for its 2026 evaluation visits and discussed preparations for a compendium of good practices based on its reports. Earlier this month, the report on [Denmark](#) was published. GRETA also visited Ireland, North Macedonia, and Serbia this month. In all three countries, representatives of LSI members were met – Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI), Open Gate/La Strada North Macedonia, and ASTRA in Serbia.

CIVIL SOCIETY



Shrinking Space in the Western Balkans

As tensions between civil society and the government in Serbia continue, UN experts have [warned](#) of continued attacks on journalists and to halt the ongoing threats and "state-sponsored narratives" targeting independent media, as CSOs report increasing pressure and a shrinking civic space.

LSI's member, ASTRA, confirms this trend, highlighting authorities' strategies of both on-paper pressure and administrative obstruction, including the prolonged non-renewal of ASTRA's licence for Serbia's only specialised anti-trafficking hotline. Reported restrictions include data documentation and extended administrative silence exhaust CSOs' and limit victims' access to assistance and support.

A [new study](#) examining how major bilateral and multilateral public donors – EU, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Germany, France, and the UK – have shifted their aid priorities in the Balkans, notes major shifts in public funding, marked by the sudden suspension of USAID programmes in 2025, which froze over \$120 million in assistance. This exposed the sector's dependence on a small number of donors and led to layoffs, stalled initiatives, and increased smear campaigns against NGOs.

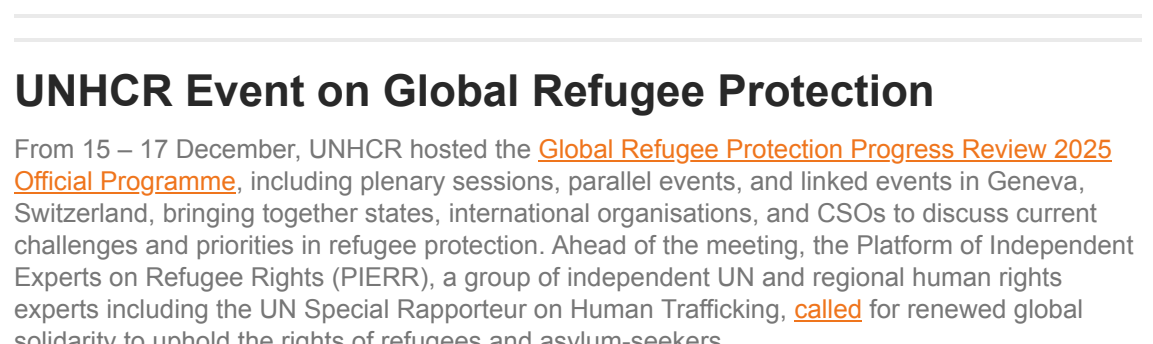
Unpacking the New EU Civil Society Strategy

The European Civil Forum has published a [policy briefing unpacking the new EU Civil Society Strategy](#), providing an in-depth exploration of its key elements and advising a model letter for civil society to urge governments to take action. [Read also LSI's article](#).

CIVICUS Monitor Downgrades Civic Space Ratings Across Europe

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#) has downgraded the civic space ratings of France, Germany and Italy from "Narrowed" to "Obstructed", Serbia, Georgia and Switzerland have also downgraded, signalling a rapid decline in civic space across Europe, with Serbia and Georgia shifting to "Repressed". These changes reflect years of mounting pressure on civil society, including rules of law erosion, police violence, surveillance, restrictions on assembly and expression, and targeting of journalists.

LABOUR RIGHTS



ILO Adopts New Guidelines to Promote Fair Work in Fisheries & Rights-Based Employment Schemes

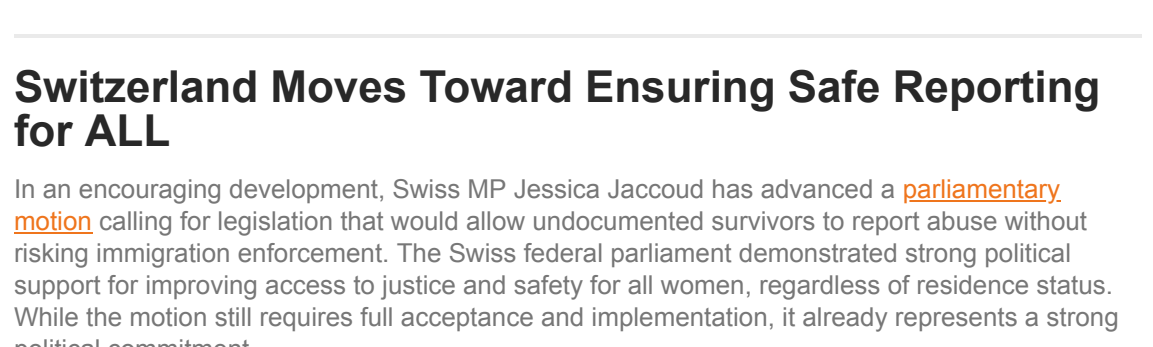
International Labour Organisation (ILO) has adopted [guidelines](#) to promote fair work and responsible recruitment for fisheries, following tripartite dialogue between governments, fishing vessel owners and fishers' representatives. The Guidelines set out practical measures, such as a clear distribution of responsibilities among stakeholders, liability mechanisms, and financial security in cases of abandonment, rules for transfer at sea and shore leave, model agreements for fishers and recruiters, safeguards against deception, and accessible complaint mechanisms. LSI member [FLEX](#) has also published research highlighting exploitative practices within the fishing industry, see members news above.

Exploitation Cases in Europe

Labour rights groups have raised concerns over the [alleged exploitation of migrant workers](#) [stemming](#) from the renovation of FC Barcelona's stadium, as well as the exploitation of migrants in excessive working hours, wage theft and unfair dismissals. LSI member ACCEM (Spain) has been closely monitoring the intersection between human trafficking, labour exploitation and sport. Carmen Martínez from ACCEM warned that "*Behind every major sporting event lie stories that were met – Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI), Open Gate/La Strada North Macedonia, and ASTRA in Serbia.*"

As Italy advances policies to selectively determine which migrants may enter the country, a new [investigation](#) by Italian prosecutors found alleged 'heavy exploitation' of Chinese migrant workers in subcontracting factories supplying 13 luxury fashion brands, including Dolce & Gabbana, Versace and Prada. The findings highlight ongoing risks of abuse within supply chains and the need for stronger due diligence obligations for European companies.

BUSINESS ACCOUNTABILITY



EU Scales Back Corporate Due Diligence Obligations

One year on, the EU chooses to shift away from human rights values, prioritising business interests. On 9 December, the Council and the EU Parliament reached a provisional agreement, significantly weakening due diligence and reporting obligations under the CSDD and the CSDDD. On 16 December, the European Parliament [voted in favour](#) of the agreement.

La Strada International warns that the agreement reduces corporate accountability for human rights abuses and undermines alignment with international standards, concerns also echoed by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk. [Read our full analysis on the LSI website](#).

G20+ Modern Slavery Prevention Index

The [G20+ Modern Slavery Prevention Index](#) highlights uneven funding, limited transparency and insufficient resorting of national strategies to prevent exploitation. It shows particularly low government investment in action against corporate perpetrators of forced labour, wage theft and other supply chain abuses, with the United States having a notable exception. The index also reports that since 2021, no G20 country analysed has recorded corporate prosecutions for supply chain abuses.

(FAIR) MIGRATION



EU Council Agrees on Draft Return Regulation

The EU Council has reached a deal on the [draft Return Regulation](#), aiming to respond to current return trends but focusing primarily on returns while overlooking irregular realities. Evidence shows that restrictive migration policies do not reduce migration or irregular migration; instead, they often increase irregularity, fuel smuggling networks, and expose people on the move to greater risks of exploitation and human trafficking. Significant public funds continue to be directed towards externalisation and border securitisation measures that fail to deliver effective or rights-respecting outcomes.

La Strada International expresses serious concern about the impact of these policies on migrants' rights and safety. They risk ensuring safe return, including for those who have been subjected to exploitation, including care from a new country, by ensuring access to support services and immigration enforcement, to guarantee access to justice. Read [PICUM's analysis](#) for an overview of the agreed changes.

In parallel, the Council has also moved forward with new rules on [safe countries of origin](#) and [safe third countries](#). The revised framework expands the use of the safe third country concept, allowing asylum applications to be declared inadmissible without examining their substance, including in cases where applicants merely travelled through a third country or where arrangements exist with non-EU states. La Strada International is particularly concerned about the inclusion of Colombia, which, according to LSI's [2024 statistics](#), was the country of origin most frequently reported among the trafficked persons assisted by our members. This raises serious questions about how "safety" is assessed and the risks such designations pose to access to protection.

Later this month, the Member states have also agreed on the [establishment of the annual solidarity pool](#) for 2026.

How Smuggling Really Works

A new [report](#) from the Mixed Migration Centre, based on over 80,000 interviews with migrants and refugees worldwide, and more than 450 interviews with smugglers, shows that restrictive migration policies without corresponding legal pathways strengthen – not weaken – smuggling networks. The research further concludes that smugglers do not drive irregular migration; instead, migrants are over three times more likely to seek their services when routes are dangerous. It also finds that over 70% of smuggling networks consist of no more than ten people.

European Migrant Smuggling Annual Report

The [European Migrant Smuggling 9th Annual Report](#) provides an overview of Europe's activities combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, including the role of CSOs. The report mainly originates from Eastern Europe and non-European third countries and are exploited across Western Europe. It notes increasingly diversified, poly-criminal networks, the growing use of digital platforms for recruitment and control, and complex profit-laundering methods. In response, EU-wide efforts to counter Europe's led to over 188 cross-border operations. LSI also underlines that many trafficking cases do not involve large transnational criminal organisations, and that exploitation frequently occurs at the local level.

UNHCR Event on Global Refugee Protection

From 15 – 17 December, UNHCR hosted the [Global Refugee Protection Progress Review 2025 Official Programme](#), including plenary sessions, parallel events, and linked events in Geneva, Switzerland, bringing together states, international organisations, and CSOs to discuss current challenges and priorities in refugee protection. Ahead of the meeting, the Platform of Independent Experts on Refugee Rights (PIERR), a group of independent UN and regional human rights experts including the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking, [called](#) for renewed global solidarity to uphold the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers.

The Facilitation Directive and Its Compatibility with Human Rights Law

UN experts [expressed](#) alarm at UN discussions around the Facilitation Directive, proposed to counter the smuggling of migrants, and its compatibility with international law on how states are particularly the potential absence of a mandatory humanitarian exemption. Read here [UN experts' full analysis](#) and also [PICUM's policy paper](#).

ACCESS TO RIGHTS



ESWA Highlights Barriers to Justice for Sex Workers

To mark the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, ESWA published a [research](#) [documenting sex workers' experiences as victims of crime](#). Despite European laws guaranteeing protection for all victims of crime and recognising the heightened risks of violence and discrimination faced by sex workers, the report shows that significant barriers to justice persist. The findings reveal ongoing obstacles to safe reporting, access to support services, and legal protection. Notably, 70.7% of participants reported experiencing discrimination by police when reporting violence, underscoring the urgent need for rights-based and inclusive responses.

Switzerland Moves Toward Ensuring Safe Reporting for ALL

In an encouraging development, Swiss MP Jessica Jacoud has advanced a [bill mandating](#) [police](#) calling for legislation that would allow undocumented survivors to report abuse without risking immigration enforcement. The Swiss federal parliament demonstrated strong political support for improving access to justice and safety for all women, regardless of residence status. While the motion still requires full acceptance and implementation, it already represents a strong political commitment.

EIGE Gender Equality Index

The [EIGE Gender Equality Index 2025](#) shows continued progress across the EU, however violence against women remains pervasive, severe and widely underreported. Gender-based violence restricts women's participation in economic, social and political life, it also intersects poverty, racism and social exclusion, placing older women, migrants, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ persons at heightened risk, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and human trafficking.

Barriers to NRM Recognition in the UK

A [briefing](#) from the Policy Evidence Centre (PEC) examined the key factors influencing negative decisions within the UK's National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Referrals from government agencies were more likely to be rejected than those from NGOs, and cases of domestic exploitation were less frequently recognised. It also shows major disparities: men were 78% more likely than women to receive a "not credible" decision, adults were eight times more likely than children to receive a negative outcome, and Albanian and Vietnamese nationals were disproportionately affected.

Seminar on Organ Sales and Migration

On 27 November, the authors of "[Organs, Bodies, Borders](#)" discussed their research on kidney sales involving migrants and the experiences of medical professionals across the Euro-Mediterranean region in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Speakers highlighted how socio-economic hardship, irregular migration status and organ scarcity create particular vulnerabilities to organ sale and forced removal.

STRATEGIC LITIGATION

Amnesty International Launches Corporate Crimes Handbook

Amnesty International has released its [Corporate Crimes Handbook](#), drawing on a two-year study and insights from global civil society. The handbook seeks information on how states are upholding persistent power imbalances in corporate accountability but emphasises that meaningful cooperation between rights defenders, civil society and, where appropriate, law enforcement can help hold corporate perpetrators to account.

CALLS FOR INPUT

- European Commission**: Call for Evidence on the new EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, to be adopted in 2026 is out. You can participate by submitting your input through the [Have Your Say](#). Portal: Deadline: 26 January 2026.
- European Commission**: [Public consultation](#) to gather views from across civil society on how to enhance the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. Deadline: 6 February 2026.
- UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons**: [Call for input](#) for her report on child trafficking and the rights of migrant, refugee, asylum-seekers and stateless children, with a focus on prevention, protection and accountability. Deadline: 30 January 2026.
- UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls**: [Call for input](#) for her next report to the Human Rights Council. The consultation seeks information on how states are addressing violence against women and girls, including prevention measures, access to justice, protection mechanisms and support services. Deadline: 06 February 2026.
- UNODC**: Public consultation for non-governmental stakeholders for the development of UNODC's Strategy 2026-2030. Share your contributions by participating in this [survey](#). Deadline: 1 January 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Movie: [The Pickers](#)** (2024), directed by Elke Sasse shows who is paying the price for cheap fruit and vegetables – the pickers. The documentary exposes how irregular and migrant workers in southern Europe are often facing exploitation, precarity, and invisibility.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- Report: Survivor Connections**, Project Respect Australia and Fair Futures published a new report on [economic empowerment and preventing re-blame slavery](#), driven by lived experience, examining why economic empowerment is so critical to preventing exploitation and human trafficking.
- Article: [A new open Democratic article](#)** by Mary Linstro-Dobner from GAATW, of which LSI is a member, highlights emerging alliances between radical feminist and religious groups. These alliances, once focused mainly on opposing sex work, are now extending anti-trafficking narratives to target broader sexual and reproductive freedoms, including advocating for the abolition of surrogacy and promoting transphobic ideas. GAATW is responding by strengthening rights-based alliances to counter these harmful narratives.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 20 January 2026** - FLEX is hosting a [presentation and panel discussion event](#) in the UK Parliament, on their new report on fishing immigration systems: [Unravelling the Nets: Report Launch and Policy Deep Dive](#), 18.00 – 20.00 UK time.
- 11 - 12 February 2026** - OECD Forum on Due Diligence in the Garment and Footwear Sector, Paris and online. A common denominator of the discussions is the [OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector](#). Registrations for the forum opened in October.
- 11 - 13 February 2026** - [Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour](#) in Morocco a milestone gathering that will unite governments, workers, employers, and partners to accelerate global efforts to end child labour.
- 9 - 20 March 2026** - [70th Commission on the Status of Women](#) UN Headquarters – New York, United States)
- April 2026** - OSCE Alliance conference on Trafficking in Human Beings, Vienna, Austria
- 11 - 12 May 2026** - Freedom from Slavery Global Forum in Istanbul, [register here](#).

Support us

We are fully dependent on donations and subsidies. By making a donation, you will help us continue our monitoring and advocacy work to ensure accountability for the effective implementation of European anti-trafficking policies and ensure the support to trafficked persons:

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info@lastradainternational.org

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